

Testimony of Jodi Grant  
Executive Director  
Afterschool Alliance  
Washington, DC

Good afternoon. My name is Jodi Grant, and I'm the Executive Director of the Afterschool Alliance. We are a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization supported by a group of public, private, and nonprofit entities working to ensure that all children have access to quality afterschool programs. Thank you for the honor of testifying here today. Millions of children, families and communities are reaping the benefits of afterschool programs supported by this committee and I want to personally thank Chairman Regula for his leadership in making quality afterschool programs available to our children. I know many of the members of this committee have some experience with us, because you've attended one or more of our *Lights On Afterschool* celebrations in communities across the country every October.

I'm going to leave the talking today to my friend Matthew Horning, who is the Director of the Alliance Middle School 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center in Alliance City, Ohio. Matt will tell you why the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers initiative is so vital to his community, and how the funding freeze and across-the-board cuts to this vitally important federal initiative is playing out in his community.

I know you have many important programs to consider. But I want to make clear why the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC) initiative is so important. As you know, it supports afterschool programming for one million children. The afterschool programs supported by the initiative provide those kids with academic support that inspires them to learn. It helps keep them safe and healthy during the afternoon hours when juvenile crime rates soar, and constructively engaged when they might otherwise be getting into trouble on the streets, or perhaps taking drugs, joining gangs or engaging in other inappropriate behaviors.

Recent studies show that students who regularly attend quality afterschool programs achieve at higher levels academically and are more likely to stay in school and graduate. The 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC initiative is about even more than academics. Afterschool provides an opportunity for students to work with mentors, role models and develop social and professional skills that last a lifetime.

The funding freeze is a huge problem for afterschool programs around the nation. In December, the Afterschool Alliance released a report which found that the majority of states had made not a single new 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grant last year, because they had no money left to give. All their funds had been committed in the expectation that appropriations would rise to match the authorized levels, or at least get close to them. In the meantime, states committed the money that they had – as they are required by law to do. So by the time 2005 rolled around, they had nothing left to give. A few states addressed it by cutting back on grants they'd already committed to, leaving some programs in a lurch. But most simply made no new grants.

The reason the states are forced into these impossible choices is that the federal appropriation for the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC initiative has been basically flat since 2002. Actually, it's gone down with across the board cuts. Those dollars NOT spent represent children who do not get the care and instruction in the afternoons that their families want and need for them.

Matthew Horning will be able to explain it far better than I could, so I'll turn it over to him now.

Testimony of Matthew Horning  
Director of the Navigators Afterschool Program  
Alliance Middle School  
Alliance, Ohio

Thank you. My name is Matthew Horning, and I'm the Director of the Navigators Afterschool Program at Alliance Middle School in Alliance, Ohio. We're a proud 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC) grantee, now in the fourth year of our grant.

I want to tell you how absolutely critical the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC initiative has been to our students and our community. Like a lot of the communities that get 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grants, Alliance is a poor community with around 2/3 of our students qualifying for free and reduced lunch. Though we are surrounded by agricultural areas, we are basically a little inner city. At one point in the last decade, we had the highest crime and drug rate per capita in the state.

The Navigators Program serves 350 of the enrolled students at Alliance City Middle School – almost half. Some come every day, some a couple days a week. We serve students a snack, using USDA snack funds. Then we offer a variety of activities including tutoring, special interest clubs such as robotics, cooking, African drumming, and scrapbooking, and even bus students to the local YMCA where they learn personal fitness, nutrition and exercise.

Our program really affects the lives of our students and their families. Recently, David began attending our afterschool Study Table. David has a history of school violence and is in danger of failing the school year. After only a few weeks, David's mom called me to say "thank you" because he was showing so much improvement. For the first time all year he had told her about an upcoming test, studied for the test, and then came home and told her how he did! He also has been taking homework home every night when he used to bring it home maybe twice a month. David's mom said that just knowing he had extra time afterschool to get his work done and get his questions answered took such a weight off David's shoulders that he is now excited about coming to school. Even his behavior has improved because he no longer feels the need to disrupt class to cover up for not

having his work done or not knowing the answers. David's mom is so happy for him that she has been calling out of town relatives to tell them how much he's improved.

Every 21st CCLC program has many Davids who have grown to rely on the services they provide and the relationships they have built with caring afterschool staff. But like many other afterschool programs, we are looking at a bad funding problem. Our current 21st CCLC grant will run out next year. And because of the freeze on 21st CCLC funds, Ohio has been cutting back on the number of new grants awarded each year. Last year Ohio only funded two percent of new 21st CCLC proposals. In our community, that funding is essential because Alliance City doesn't have a booming economy that would enable local businesses to give us the financial support we would need. We've reached out, believe me. We partner with lots of agencies and civic organizations like the Y, a local college, the police department and others, so that we can get the benefit of their expertise while stretching our dollars as far as they can go. We even sit on a Stark County Afterschool Council with other afterschool programs working on issues such as quality standards and funding for afterschool programs.

But there's no business or group of businesses in our community that will replace the 21st CCLC funding. We have one community foundation in our city and their annual output for all of last year matched our annual budget.

We ought to be increasing the number of afterschool slots to serve more children, not decreasing. But if programs like ours are forced to close or cut back what we provide, that's exactly what will be happening across the country.

So I'm here today to ask you to please continue to support funding for afterschool programs. There are so many non-academic barriers to school success, and that is really where afterschool programs can step in. Just as we took the pressure off David by offering time afterschool to get his homework done, afterschool programs can take the pressure off daytime staff by helping students deal with all the outside issues that prevent them from being able to concentrate on academics during the day. But the freeze on funding is causing us to fall farther and farther behind, leaving kids and their families without the afterschool support they need. Congress was wise to devise a roadmap of modest and steady increases for the 21st CCLC initiative in the *No Child Left Behind Act*. Steady growth made sense then, and it makes even more sense now. I thank you for your wisdom in adopting that roadmap, and I urge you to make good on that commitment by following through with the dollars that will allow programs like ours to continue to serve the millions of kids like David across the country for whom afterschool programs are the answer to a prayer.

Thank you very much.